

## **New Year's greetings from Vlado Ilić**

My dear friends,

The year of 2014 was filled up with much more events than any other before! It was not only the Order of Love seminars having the full schedule; this Love mission brought me so much that I had almost no free weekend during this period- even the working days between weekends were scheduled for the workshops ...

However, on the other hand, my work had its high price: I had less time for being with my family. Every day life turned inexorably into an effort that my wife Nježna was finding very difficult to handle, all by herself. Taking and bringing our three children to a five-kilometre school was harder than anything else ... While looking for the most appropriate school, we found an environment where the foreground is not considered as a competition or some struggle for ratings; it was the place where learning is associated with joy and singing, and so gaining all the knowledge is received as a completely different quality and value...We therefore decided to move into a place near the school, so that the mother would not spend several hours in the car driving the children. Also, we wanted to afford them the pleasure and dignity of their own going to school. So we changed not only the town of living, but also the province, moving into almost four hundred-kilometre distance from our former residence ... The first meeting we had with the teacher of our Marko confirmed that the decision we made on this issue was the right one. Some years before, I thought that I was a very happy child, being privileged to be in the class of the "best teacher in the world", but what I experienced attending one of Marko's classes (fourth grade), instilled me a new courage – to believe that such teachers still exist, and that my son is even happier than me (or I began to forget those beautiful, magical moments of my own starting school?).

Marko's teacher lives right across the street from the school, and is always the first one to come into the class, welcome the students and greet each of them: sometimes a child wants to have more intimacy and stays in the arms of the teacher for a while, while others arrive and wait patiently for personal greeting with the teacher. And when everyone enters the class, the teacher takes the guitar - the children's hallmark – they all go to their seats (benches and chairs are arranged in a circle), and listen to the silence of the first guitar sounds before moving joyously to sing...

And so every day they start with a song as a kind of a ritual of joy. The melodies he learned at school Marko soon began to sing at home as well as Kamil (seventh grade) and Natan (second grade), which made us realise that starting a day with a song is just an every day ritual for them all. As particularly valuable were revealed the songs, especially in moments of conflict between the children. At the height of children's quarrels that even seem very much dramatic sometimes, it is enough when one of us sing some melody: one after the other the children would accept the song

and completely change their behaviour, as if the singing transfers them into another state of consciousness - and until the last moment, I would say, the irresolvable conflicts suddenly lose importance and can be easily resolved...

I have recently received a letter from my dear friend, Brother David Steindl-Rast, who actually encouraged me to write these lines you are reading. He is a true lover of music and singing, which is regarded as very much important especially during Winter holidays - even at this time and at the threshold of a New Year – when at every step you can hear the songs that mitigate the usual bustle and stress of everyday life...

An appropriate song at the threshold of the coming New, could also serve us as a reminder and exercise for a far more important and lasting attitude. It could wake us up from the lethargy overwhelming and helping us to feel alive again. Isn't this awakened vitality a welcome attitude in dealing with everything that is before us?

How important this attitude is- both for us and for the good of the world we live in- is what Brother David reminds us of, citing the words of the great philosopher, teacher and advocate for peace Howard Thurman(1899-1981): *Do not ask what the world needs. Ask yourself what is needed to wake up your vitality - and so do everything you can, as soon as possible, in order to wake it up.* And that is what this world needs most: the people who are awake and full of life! Such people do not close their eyes while watching the suffering of the world, letting tears falling from their eyes and burning inside. And catching to look at and see the Great Unity! And deep inside they understand the song which continues echoing with the angelic song dying away...For what began with angel's song, remains as a poem in our hearts. That song awakens the vitality in us, the vitality that we can only achieve with what is expressed in our Christmas wishes: healing, freedom, peace in the world - and not as arrogant, strict fighters who want to improve the world - but with love, cheerfulness, humbleness and gratitude ... despite all the blows of our destiny and the destiny of the world. About the people whose hearts are singing so, Rainer Maria Rilke says: Our heart keeps surviving between the hammer hits, as well as our tongue between the teeth, that still does not stop glorifying...

Dear friends, In the arms of light, filled with gratitude and love, with my family together in this oasis of peace existing within us, I wish all of you, as well as all of us to have such a cantabile heart - both in these festive days, and at any time of the year that is upon us.

Much love and embrace to you and I look forward to our next meeting,  
Cordially, warmly,

Your Vlado